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Abstract

State Supervisors should use their influence to develop the English and reading programs in their states. They can improve the quality of instruction by (1) insuring the competency of reading teachers and specialists in their schools by requiring a minimum number of essential courses for beginning teachers and reading specialists; (2) developing the K-12 concept of reading instruction in the schools, especially through state education activities; (3) increasing the number of demonstration schools and classes for developing and trying out new teaching methods, materials, and administrative procedures; (4) encouraging pilot studies of new methods and materials before they are instituted into the curriculum; and (5) disseminating current information as quickly as possible to all teachers and supervisors in the field. (MF)

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THE ROLE OF THE LANGUAGE ARTS SUPERVISOR IN DEVELOPING ENGLISH AND READING PROGRAMS

By William D. Sheldon

A speech given at NDEA Institute for State Supervisors of English and Reading, Sturbridge, Massachusetts, May 5-9, 1969.

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THE ROLE OF THE LANGUAGE ARTS SUPERVISOR IN DEVELOPING ENGLISH AND READING PROGRAMS

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I consider it somewhat rash on my part to make suggestions to the participants concerning their role in developing programs in their states. To lessen the degree of impertinence an iota, I shall confine my comments to that aspect of your work which concerns Reading -- my field of interest.

I have been fortunate on two counts in my relationships to state supervisors of Reading. Since 1948 I have had many opportunities to work with and for the New York State supervisors of Reading. Since my first days at Syracuse I have frequently served and been served by such individuals as George Murphy, John Dunn, Miss Dorothy Cooke, William Miller, Mrs. Edna Morgan and Mrs. Jane Algozzine, our present Director of Reading in New York State.

Secondly, I have had a wide correspondence with, have served and been served by the state reading consultants in North Carolina, Massachusetts, Maryland and Minnesota, among others, and most recently through correspondence with 26 consultants and reading supervisors from as many states as I pursued information on Incidence and Implications of Reading Disabilities, a chapter in a book to be published by the Center For Applied Linguistics.

As I have considered the ways in which state supervisors of reading could be of influence in developing reading programs, I have

come to the conclusion that our reading programs would be best served if our state leaders would become involved, insofar as possible, in the following activities:

1. Insuring the competency of reading teachers and specialists.
2. Developing the K-12 concept of reading instruction.
3. Encouraging the development of demonstration schools and classes.
4. Encouraging pilot studies of methods and materials.
5. Disseminating information on all four of these activities.

1. Insuring the competency of Reading Teachers and Supervisors

State Education Departments, certifying agencies and teacher training institutions must work cooperatively to develop either certification requirements or strong recommendations which could provide at least minimum courses essential for beginning teachers and for various reading specialists. Surveys of our present state requirements reveal that in the majority of states reading is taught by teachers who have had no specific preparation through either course work or practice teaching. The same lack of course background is noted for reading specialists holding some of the most important reading positions in our country. They have had to prepare themselves by reading, taking special courses or through post-graduate studies after they found it necessary to learn more in order to be qualified for their positions.

State reading consultants would receive great support and cooperation from colleges and universities if they called meetings to discuss

the setting of minimum requirements for pre-service teachers and specific courses and practicums for those pursuing graduate degrees in reading education.

A simple example of the effect of merely stating desirable minimum requirements for reading specialists is that of the IRA Minimum Requirements. Many of our masters and post-masters students at Syracuse attempt to fulfill the recommended requirements of the IRA although New York State has no special certification for reading teachers or specialists. I suggest, then, that where a state requires no certification for reading specialists, a statement such as IRA's of suggested minimum requirements for certain reading specialists and supervisors should serve almost as a mandate to both schools and candidates.

2. Developing the Concept of a K-12 Reading Program

That the concept of a K-12 Reading program can be accomplished by state activities is demonstrated by the effect of bulletins issued in New York State over the past 20 years. Our most recent bulletins have served to guide schools in updating their reading programs. Of course, bulletins unaccompanied by other activities--such as conferences, meetings, in-service workshops and other dissemination activities--might well be filed away and never used.

Under the leadership of Dr. Walter Crewson, the New York State Education Department held a series of meetings in various regions of the state to advertise the state's position in regard to reading.

These meetings were widely attended and served to assure participants of the fact that they were proceeding to develop reading programs in a sound manner as far as the State Education Department was concerned or alerted others to study their programs to see why they were at variance with the suggestions of the State.

We also know that state-sponsored workshops on current thinking and practices in reading instruction can have a powerful influence on teachers and reading supervisors. Conferences held in New York State in 1968 and 1969 draw large numbers of influential participants and the positive reaction to both meetings was indicative of the timeliness of the discussions and speeches.

3. Demonstration Schools and Classes

The importance of state- or city-sponsored demonstration schools and classes seems evident as we observe the effect of the IPI centers in Pittsburgh, Syracuse and at the Nova schools in Florida. Visitors from all over the nation are observing the actual on-going development of new methods and materials in elementary and secondary schools. The Jamesville-DeWitt School demonstration of Secondary Reading drew observers from across the nation.

The state, in cooperation with the federal government, local school units and nearby colleges and universities can foster the development of extremely valuable centers for demonstrating new practices in reading and allow participants to observe them before plunging into the

installation of methods, materials, and administrative procedures. Once schools commit themselves to programs, or materials, or ways of grouping children, they find it almost impossible to reconsider without incurring great expense and sometimes controversy. We could give many examples of programs which were entered into in haste and regretted at leisure.

5. Pilot Studies

The Cornell studies in Basic Literacy and other pilot studies conducted under NDEA and EPDA have demonstrated the great value of such limited studies in aiding in the development of new procedures. Pilot studies ought to precede the development of any state-recommended program. It is likely that many programs, approaches and materials now recommended, would prove to be useless or questionable through classroom testing. In cases where state departments give broad support to unproven methods and materials, they lose not only status, but cost their states a great deal in effort and money. On the other hand where state departments either directly or indirectly disapprove of certain procedures which are proven to be efficacious, loss of respect ensues. Pilot studies can help prevent both state and local reading specialists from making mistakes in judgment.

5. Dissemination of Information

Probably our greatest need is for dissemination of what is known through every available means. Most information about reading is locked

up in obscurely written reports, often reproduced in awkward format not readily available or understood by teachers, or are found in one of the 35 or more journals, most unavailable to all but university professors or state department consultants. Often teachers learn of research through articles in popular magazines which might or might not report with accuracy. Many researchers have felt betrayed by reporters for the popular media as they read what had been selected from their scholarly papers and printed in papers and magazines for popular consumption.

A recent example of the need for proper dissemination is related to the two articles by Jensen reported in the Harvard Educational Review and the AERA Journal. These reports, the first the longest ever printed in the Harvard Education Review, were given a few lines in a popular news weekly which suggested that Negroes were inferior genetically to Whites.

Teachers need an immediate and accurate translation of such articles related to their professional activities in order that they receive more than quotes out of context, which are often sensational but seldom fully honest or true.

I have suggested that the reading supervisor in a state education department can contribute in an important manner to the development of more adequate reading instruction in their state.